

## **Residentially Based Services (RBS) Reform Project Feedback Report for San Bernardino Demonstration Site Review Conducted November 2, 2011**

### **Background:**

An on-site review of the San Bernardino RBS Demonstration Project was conducted on November 2, 2011, by representatives of the California Department of Social Services and various Los Angeles RBS Demonstration Project county agencies. (See Attachment A for a list of individual Site Review Team members.) By the time of the review, the San Bernardino Demonstration Site had been in operation for 16 months. It had enrolled a total of 24 youth placed by either the county child welfare or probation agency with the one RBS provider, Victor Treatment Centers.

The purposes of the review were to assess fidelity to the county's approved RBS Memorandum of Understanding and the county's continued conformance to RBS tenets as their program evolves; to monitor RBS implementation and identify implementation glitches for resolution; to identify local technical assistance needs; and to begin assessing quality of services delivered. An additional benefit of conducting the review was to engage Los Angeles County as a "peer" Demonstration Site in the review process in order to promote the identification and dissemination of best practices among the four RBS Demonstration Sites.

Prior to the on-site portion of the review, the Demonstration Site was asked to provide a report of the "RBS Days of Care" for each youth admitted to the RBS project since it began. This was designed to illustrate how youth have moved through the residential group care component to lower level foster care placement and, eventually, to permanency. It was also designed to capture any use of crisis stabilization.

The actual on-site review consisted of group and individual interviews, as well as the review of randomly selected provider comprehensive plans of care for enrolled youth. Group interviews were conducted separately with county staff and with provider staff. Individual interviews were conducted with four client youth and one family member, pursuant to the RBS site review protocol that a minimum of three youth and one family member are to be interviewed from each provider. All interviews were conducted using standardized interview questions. The protocol also established the number of comprehensive care plans to be reviewed at 30 percent of youth enrolled in RBS. For the San Bernardino Demonstration Site, comprehensive plans of care were reviewed for 24 youth. The review team also toured one of the provider's RBS facilities.

### **Observations and Recommendations:**

The following discussion is intended to capture at a high level (1) what is working well in the local Demonstration Site; (2) what challenges have been encountered by the site and how the Demonstration Site has chosen to address those challenges; and (3)

additional changes the Site Review Team recommends the Demonstration Site consider incorporating.

### Strengths:

The San Bernardino Demonstration Site enjoys a strong, collaborative partnership among participating county and provider agencies. Successful strategies have been employed in the areas of family engagement, care coordination, RBS staff resources, interagency collaboration and therapeutic interventions. Examples of these strategies include:

- Engineering a culture shift to have staff view the family as part of the solution rather than as the problem, and to change terminology to refer to the group home as a “transition home”.
- Overcoming barriers to family participation by providing concrete, individualized support to families, such as transportation, scheduling events in the community and when convenient for families to attend, providing therapy on weekends, etc.
- Making structural changes at the residential facility to make it more welcoming and facilitate family visits.
- Involving youth and families in case planning at the Care Coordination Team (CCT) meetings and making these meetings family and youth-driven to allow youth and family to better understand their needs and develop their own goals.
- Involving the Intensive Treatment Foster Care (ITFC) provider in the CCT meetings to ensure collaboration and communication in meeting the needs of the youth as they transition from residential group care to an ITFC home.
- Employing skilled provider staff, such as the Parent Partner, Soto House Supervisor and School Liaison, who provide support and reinforce therapeutic interventions to the youth and families in various situations and settings.
- Assigning all RBS Probation cases to one Probation Officer to facilitate the commitment of the Probation agency to the RBS principles and the active participation of Probation in the RBS program. This is important considering the complex needs of Probation youth and the importance of commitment and participation in RBS by the county placing agency.
- Linking youth to activities in the community that are geared towards the youth’s interests.
- Collaborating with the Department of Behavioral Health to ensure continuation of mental health services when youth are transferred out of county.
- Transitioning youth to ITFC placement gradually over a week or more to ensure a positive connection exists between the youth and ITFC family prior to placement.
- Employing multiple therapeutic interventions to meet the needs of the youth and family, such as hiring an Addiction Therapist to provide a 12-step treatment program to youth and families with substance abuse issues. Other successful therapeutic interventions include family therapy to resolve conflict within the family and facilitate connection with the youth, as well as utilizing a Trauma-Informed Care Model (Risking Connections) by provider, Child Welfare and

Probation staff, resulting in a reduction of Absent Without Leave (AWOL) incidents.

#### Challenges Identified and Adaptations Made by the San Bernardino Demonstration Site:

Several challenges have been identified by the Demonstration Site during the operation of their RBS program. The most critical challenges are discussed below.

- San Bernardino's target population focuses on high-needs youth who present difficult behaviors and have complex needs. Some of these youth have substance abuse issues; some steal; some fight verbally and/or are physically assaultive. These behaviors create a negative influence on and strained living environment for the other youth residing in the same facility. Serving these youth within the RBS milieu and ensuring their behaviors do not negatively affect the progress of other youth is a challenge. The difficulty of this target population is reflected in the fact that during these first 16 months of San Bernardino's pilot project, six youth had to be disenrolled prior to successful completion of the program. Inconsistent participation by county social workers in the CCT process has created numerous challenges.
- Unlike the Probation Officer, the Child Welfare Social Worker function in RBS is not centralized. Different Social Workers have demonstrated varying degrees of understanding and commitment to the RBS principles, and participation in CCT meetings. Lack of Social Worker commitment and participation has resulted in unilateral decision making by the Social Worker, such as changing the plan of course made in the CCTs by those who consistently participate and not recognizing youth "voice and choice" by unilaterally rejecting possible permanency options identified by the youth.
- Due to a lengthy selection and contracting process, utilizing an ITFC provider took longer than expected. This resulted in a loss of hope and stalled momentum for some youth who were unable to transition out of the residential group home and into the community when they were otherwise ready to do so.
- In addition to the multiple, traditional therapeutic interventions utilized by San Bernardino, non-traditional therapies are also being employed frequently. Adequately documenting this therapy to be claimed to Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) or Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) fund sources is a challenge.
- The location of one of the provider facilities (Rowan House) in a high crime area of San Bernardino presents youth with easy accessibility to drugs and gang activities. In addition, the appearance and upkeep of this facility was identified as a challenge.
- Families have presented some challenges. For some, dedication and enthusiasm waned once the family realized the amount of work needed to reunify. For others, family members once thought to be viable permanency options proved not to be because of the gravity of family issues that needed to be resolved.

Adaptations have been made by the Demonstration Site to enhance service delivery and improve case outcomes. The most important adaptations are discussed below.

- Expanding the role of the Family Clinician to include responsibilities as lead clinician. This adaptation allowed the Family Clinician to provide oversight and guidance to all clinical staff.
- Assigning behavioral support staff to specialized functions. This adaptation created specialized positions for a school liaison and community liaison, enhancing their productivity.
- Creating formal guidelines for CCTs to ensure quality, consistent structure, and timely follow-up.
- Including the ITFC provider in the CCTs has helped address the issue of confusion occurring between the roles of the group home staff and the community placement staff when youth step down from the residential group home component.

#### Observations and Recommendations of the Site Review Team:

The following are observations and recommendations the Site Review Team made in addition to those identified above by the Demonstration Site:

- Successfully transitioning youth out of residential group care within an average of 12 months is a fundamental component of the San Bernardino Demonstration Site's RBS program model and critical to the sustainability of its funding model. Review of the RBS Days of Care Schedule identified that, one youth successfully exited the RBS program to a permanent placement during the reporting period. Of those youth who successfully exited from residential group care, the average stay in RBS group care was approximately seven and one-half months. Of the youth enrolled in the RBS program (residential plus community placement) for 12 months or more, four of five youth remained in RBS group residential placement longer than the target goal of 12 months by the end of the reporting period. Of the four that remained in residential group placement for longer than 12 months, none were excessive; their placement in group care ranged from slightly under 13 months for three youth and approximately 14 and one-half months for one youth. However, during the reporting period, San Bernardino had six youth unsuccessfully disenroll from RBS for various reasons. While this may be related to San Bernardino serving high-needs youth, all premature disenrollments should continue to be carefully evaluated.
- San Bernardino's target population includes youth with high-needs who present difficult behaviors and substance abuse issues that negatively affect other youth. Consider addressing during therapy sessions youth's concerns regarding the influence of other youth. Also, consider acquiring court order to more closely monitor use of cash allowances by youth with substance abuse issues to prevent youth's ability to use the funds to purchase drugs.
- Social Worker commitment to and participation in shared decision making is critical under RBS. Consider all ways possible to ensure full Social Worker participation in CCTs. Possibilities include, mandating Social Workers attend

CCT meetings, providing incentives for participating in CCTs and/or penalties for not participating in CCTs, assigning all RBS child welfare cases to one Social Worker for the remainder of the pilot project, and/or aggressively engaging county leadership to revisit its commitment to ensure full Social Worker participation in RBS.

- Continue aggressively assisting in the recruitment of ITFC homes. Consider community outreach and/or targeted recruitment to identify possible ITFC homes.
- Since RBS is a major shift from traditional group care, consider additional ways of clarifying and reinforcing roles of group home staff and community placement staff when youth transition from the residential group home to the community. Also, consider ongoing trainings to facilitate culture change for all providers (including group home and ITFC), all participating county agencies, and families.
- To address challenge of adequately documenting non-traditional therapy to be claimed to MHSA or EPSDT fund sources, consider requesting guidance from other counties.
- Consider instituting measures to mitigate the negative influence of the neighborhood in which Rowan House is located.
- During the review of the comprehensive care plans it was observed that the Plans of Care are appropriately mental health and child focused. However, staff roles should be clarified to better understand what staff is doing to support achievement of the Plan of Care goals. Also, if family finding is being conducted, this should be discussed in the Plan of Care.

### **Training and/or Technical Assistance Requested:**

The Demonstration Site requested information on any available training sessions regarding family finding.

### **Conclusions:**

The San Bernardino RBS Demonstration Project is operating in substantial conformance with the program described in its Memorandum of Understanding with the California Department of Social Services and with the principles and practices of RBS. However, it is still too early to draw conclusions about client outcomes and fiscal implications.

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